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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007963

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE'S MOUSSA TO BAGHDAD; SEEKING USG
BACKING FOR HOLDING IRAQI NATIONAL DIALOGUE

REF: A. CAIRO 7725

[1](#)B. JEDDAH 3953 (NOTAL)

[1](#)C. STATE 189909

Classified by Ambassador Ricciardone for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message contains an action request. See paragraph five.

Summary

[1](#)2. (C) During an October 15 meeting with the Ambassador to discuss Iraq's constitution referendum, Arab League Secretary General Moussa outlined plans for a visit to Iraq, October 20-21 (protect dates). In Iraq, Moussa intends to seek buy-in for League plans to host a national gathering of Iraqi political groups (excluding terror groups, venue and date to be determined). Moussa sought USG political support for Arab League engagement on Iraq's political process, limited MNF-I technical support for the visit (paragraph seven), and USG "understanding" for what he saw as his need to entertain discussion in general terms of the withdrawal of U.S. forces ("though not a specific timeline") from Iraq, as a means to draw more Sunnis away from the insurgency and into the political process. To the Ambassador's call to comment favorably on Iraq's referendum and ongoing political process (ref C), Moussa committed to making helpful public remarks once referendum results are announced, as well as during his Iraq visit. End summary.

Arab League Secretary General to Baghdad

[1](#)3. (C) Meeting late on October 15 with the Ambassador and poloff (notetaker), Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa and his Chief of Staff Hesham Youssef detailed plans for an October 20-21 League mission to Iraq, as agreed by AL ministers in Jeddah October 2 (ref B). Moussa said he would lead a delegation of 8 AL officials, 11 AL security personnel, and a group of 10 journalists to Iraq October 20-21. Moussa will fly from Cairo to Baghdad on a Bahraini charter jet, overnight at either the Mugamma al Wuzarah (beside the Green Zone) or at the home of FM Zebari, and return to Cairo after a visit to meet Kurdish leader Barzani in Irbil. Moussa requested that we keep details of his trip, including dates, very close-hold for security reasons.

[1](#)4. (C) Despite what he described as strong pressure by professional and personal contacts to cancel the trip, Moussa said he was committed to the visit. The armed attack on Moussa's Arab League advance team in Baghdad raised concerns, Moussa said, but would not deter him from executing the decision by Arab League ministers in Jeddah October 2 for the visit and for sponsoring a national Iraqi conference.

[1](#)5. (C) Action Request: Moussa shared his request for general political support for his mission but not loud public praise that might feed Sunni Arab perceptions that he was travelling at U.S. bidding. Moussa also welcomed limited and discreet USG and Coalition technical support both to ensure his safety and to facilitate travel within Iraq. Specifically, he would welcome any advice or assistance to ensure proper flight clearances and other required details for the Bahraini charter flight that will take Moussa from Cairo to Baghdad and from Irbil to Cairo. Moussa also intends to contact the UN senior representative in Iraq to request similar assistance, most likely in terms of transport between Baghdad and Najaf. He is reluctant to accept MNF-I helicopter lift but might be willing to do so if in some way such airlift is clearly provided under Iraqi government auspices, or possibly U.N. aircraft. Embassy Cairo Political officer Chris Hegadorn can be reached via classified e-mail (HegadornCS@state.sgov.gov) or Open Net e-mail (HegadornCS@state.gov) for operational liaison with the League. End action request.

[1](#)6. (C) Moussa detailed his intention to meet with key Iraqi government figures, including President Talabani, Prime Minister Jafari, senior ministers, and key regional and religious leaders such as al Hakim, Barzani, Adnan Duleimi,

al Dhari, and others. He was pleased to hear that Ambassador Khalilzad had agreed to meet him (per Ricciardone-Khalilzad e-mails), and had asked FM Zebari to make arrangements with U.S. Embassy Bagdad. Following meetings in Baghdad and Najaf, Moussa intends to fly to Irbil to meet Barzani before returning directly to Cairo. He will follow up his Iraq visit, he added, with regional consultations and visits to Iran, Turkey, and Syria among others.

Rationale for Arab League Involvement

17. (C) Moussa said his trip was intended to bring the AL in to "support the intensive political process certain to occur between the referendum and the December elections." He recognized that the Iraqis would be less interested, if at all, in a "national dialogue" conference in Cairo or anywhere outside Iraq, than in one held in Iraq itself. This might be the ideal, if security eventually permitted; but perhaps a "prep-con" at AL headquarters could be helpful. The important objective, he stressed, was for the AL to "engage" with both the Iraqis and the U.S./Coalition. "The Arabs have to understand that there is no alternative to this process." He specifically rejected the Arab critics' contention that democracy in Iraq was "ir-receivable from the Americans" -- in other words, unacceptable if created by the U.S.

18. (C) Moussa rehearsed with the Ambassador arguments for AL engagement in Iraq, the expected Baghdad visit, the national conference proposal, and his consultations with USG/Coalition representatives. The League's recent decision to become more engaged on Iraq, he said, reflected a shift by key Arab powers that was crucial in helping to overcome the ongoing crisis in Iraq. The decision was not intended to supplant UNSCR 1546, Moussa argued, but reflected Arab neighbors' belief that the current political process in Iraq did not fully capture a national consensus on how best to move forward. Without the League's efforts in this regard, Moussa predicted continued strong domestic Iraqi and regional resistance to American and Coalition efforts. The principal focus of the League was a national conference to help overcome such internal and regional differences, he said.

19. (C) Moussa explained that he was not wedded to the word "reconciliation (Arabic, mu-Sal-e-hah)" to which Iraqis had objected, to describe the proposed AL-backed national conference, and would seek Iraqis' agreement on appropriate terminology. The wording, whether national "accord (Arabic, wifaq)," or national "discussion (Arabic, hiwar)," was far less important than the substance of any such gathering. The Ambassador cautioned that some Iraqis might perceive the title "Wifaq al Watani (National Accord)" as AL support for former PM Allawi's political party of the same name. Moussa noted that participation in the event would not be permitted to terror groups such as Zarqawi's or others involved in terror attacks.

110. (C) Moussa stressed the historic nature of such a negotiating effort by the Arab League itself, as opposed to key members of the League, and argued that his having personal responsibility for the success or failure of the conference would streamline negotiations over planning and other technical details. The fact of the visit alone, he added, should contribute significantly to silencing local pessimism and negativity over Iraq. "Just making the trip at all will be 50 percent of its success." Still, he noted, "completely fabricated" press reports suggesting that he would seek a meeting with Saddam Hussein highlighted the level of disinformation surrounding his and Arab League intentions. "We can't deal with the Iraq crisis by complaining about it," he continued, "we have to become part and parcel of the process. And, we Arabs must speak with the United States about Iraq - we can not stand aside."

Coalition "Withdrawal" on Agenda

111. (C) Repeating the argument he used with visiting Iraq Policy Coordinator Jeffrey and delegation (ref A), Moussa emphasized his need to "talk about talking about" the topic of MNF withdrawal -- which he insisted had already been broached within UNSCR 1546. "We're not trying to corner you" with a time-line commitment, he added, but he recognized the crucial importance to Iraqi resistance elements of this topic. If Moussa can include this topic on the agenda for the national dialogue, the League would be better able to draw political opposition groups now outside the process to participate constructively. The Ambassador cautioned Moussa not to be drawn into discussion of specific timelines for withdrawal of Coalition forces, nor to mistake foreign withdrawal as the definition of success for Iraq. The USG, the Ambassador said, was committed to supporting the Iraqi government until it had established a free nation capable of governing and defending itself.

Demarche on Support for Constitution

12. (C) The Ambassador stressed the importance of public AL support for the October 15 referendum, especially in recognizing the ongoing and successful implementation to date of UNSCR 1546. Drawing from ref C demarche talking points, the Ambassador noted that the Iraqi government and Washington alike had been disappointed by the relative silence from the League on the constitution process. Moussa listed earlier significant help he said the League offered the Iraqi government and pledged to comment favorably to the media once referendum results were announced. The constitution negotiations, he noted, had achieved positive results. He would certainly comment favorably on the process during his Iraq trip. Moussa also told the Ambassador that he had telephoned Iraqi Islamic Party leader Tareq al Hashimi ahead of the referendum, only half-jokingly "taking credit" for the former's decision to announce his support for the last-minute crucial amendments brokered by Embassy Baghdad.

Comment

13. (C) We see Moussa's trip as a sign of constructive Arab engagement on Iraq. Notwithstanding the official "cover" of the Jedda/AL Ministerial of October 2, Moussa appears well out in front of Arab and AL opinion. He is showing both personal and political courage in making the trip, and wants at least tacit USG and allied support. He also wants at least our tolerance for whatever he evidently fears he might be constrained to say about "withdrawal of foreign forces" to play up to the Iraqi and broader Arab rejectionists. The naivete of some of Moussa's notions about dealing with Iraqis indicates just how much he (and through him, the AL) stands to learn from direct exposure to the complicated ground truth in Iraq. We welcome Embassy Baghdad's suggestions on what we can do to work with the League to facilitate their visit. End comment.

RICCIARDONE